

# 1 Alcohol misuse among students

## Information sheet 1 | Introduction

These information sheets may be used in the treatment of alcohol misuse among university students. They help to answer two questions:

1. How can I recognize alcohol misuse?
2. What can I do about it?

The information sheets accompany the Dutch-language guidelines 'Recognizing, screening and brief intervention: alcohol misuse among students (2022)'. Please consult these guidelines for more in-depth information on alcohol misuse among students. The information sheets can also be used for the misuse of other substances, which in many cases accompanies alcohol misuse.

### Who should use the guidelines and information sheets?

The guidelines and information sheets can be used by:

- Addiction treatment centres: prevention workers.
- Educational institutions: mentors, academic career counsellors, student advisers, student deans.
- Student associations, study associations, student sports associations: board members, confidential contact persons.

### How should the guidelines and information sheets be used?

The guidelines and information sheets provide information, advice and tips on how to prevent, recognize and treat alcohol misuse. They help answer the following questions:

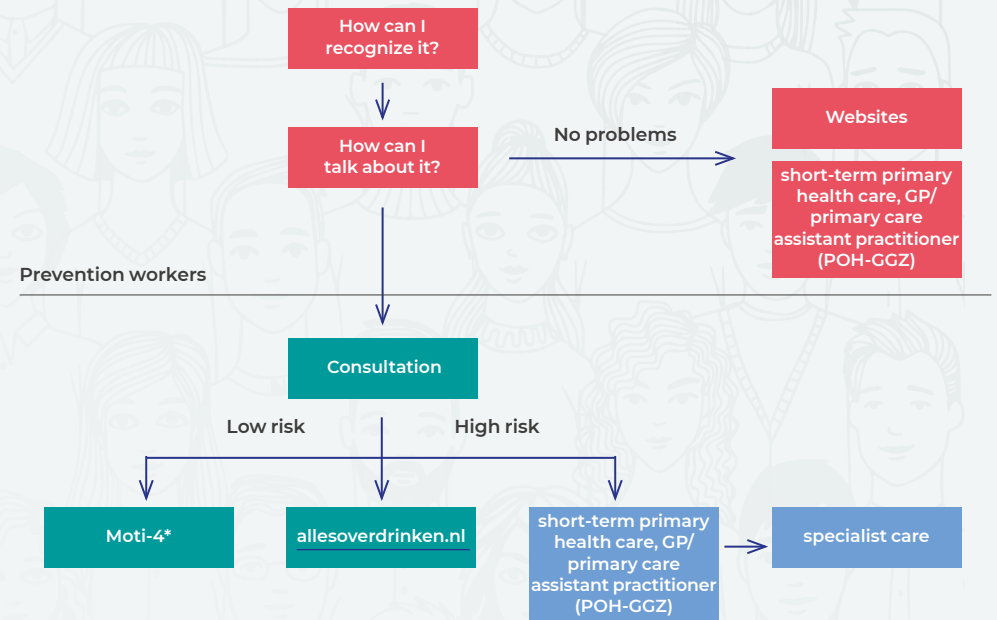
- How can I talk to students about the risks of alcohol and its impact on the mind and body?
- How can I recognize alcohol misuse among students?
- How can I talk about alcohol misuse with students?
- How can I refer students?

### How can I recognize alcohol misuse?

Concrete examples of how to recognize alcohol misuse are given on information sheet 2.


### Flow chart - How can I recognize it? What can I do?

Places frequented by students



\* For international students, discuss the options for English-language counselling.

### Who produced the guidelines and information sheets?

The guidelines and information sheets were produced by the Samenwerkingsverband Vroeg-signalerend Alcoholproblematiek (SVA). In this partnership, GGD GHOR Nederland, the Trimbos Institute and the Dutch Addiction Association are working together to prevent alcohol misuse. SVA is part of the National Prevention Agreement. For more information, go to [www.herkenalcoholproblematiek.nl](http://www.herkenalcoholproblematiek.nl). 

**In the educational institution, who has contact with students who consume alcohol?**

- The student's mentor
- The student's lecturers
- The student counsellor
- Student advisers and academic career counsellors
- Student psychologists
- Confidential advisers
- Fellow students

**In the study/student/sports associations, who has contact with students who consume alcohol?**

- Board members
- Confidential contact persons
- Fellow students

**What are possible signs of alcohol misuse?**

There are two types of signs of alcohol misuse:

**1. Physical and mental****2. The student's behaviour****1. Physical signs of alcohol misuse might include the following:**

- The student is tipsy or drunk.
- The student is sweating, shaking or nervous; these could be withdrawal symptoms.
- The student smells of alcohol.
- The student has gastrointestinal problems.
- The student puts on or loses weight.
- The student is tired or has headaches.
- The student takes less care of their personal hygiene.

- There are visible injuries caused by accidents that take place when under the influence of alcohol.
- Alcohol poisoning.

**2. The student's behaviour**

The following may be signs of alcohol misuse:

- The student frequently arrives late (several times a week).
- The student fails to attend classes/lectures.
- The student exhibits aggressive or other problematic behaviour.
- The student withdraws from social situations (becomes isolated).
- The student exhibits signs of depression or anxiety.
- The student cannot control their emotions/has outbursts of anger.
- The student exhibits improper sexual behaviour.
- Complaints are made about the student's behaviour.
- The student regularly or often has a hangover.
- The student talks a lot about alcohol, drinking and/or other substances (such as cannabis, cocaine, ecstasy).
- The student also drinks alone, for example in their room in their student accommodation.
- The student has friends who consume a lot of alcohol.
- The student's grades start to fall. Also note difficulty with concentrating, or the student having trouble understanding things that were not previously a problem.
- The student often visits the GP, or has regular accidents with the bike or car.

**What can I do?**

Ask the student the questions on information sheet 3. If you suspect serious alcohol misuse, you should contact your local addiction prevention worker for more information or consultation.

# 3

## Alcohol misuse among students

### Information sheet 3a | How can I talk about alcohol misuse with students?

#### How can I recognize alcohol misuse?

Alcohol misuse is not easy to spot. An overview of the signs is given in Table 1 on page 13 of the guidelines. You should also consider the reasons why a student might drink (relationship dependency, suppressing emotions, drinking alone, impact on study results). For students, a score >7 (female) or >8 (male) on the AUDIT-C questionnaire is also an indicator of alcohol misuse.

#### Why should I talk about it?

Talking to the student about their alcohol consumption is a first step in recognizing the signs. A short conversation with the student can confirm your suspicions, or help make sure that you do not draw the wrong conclusions.

#### How can I talk about alcohol misuse with students?

Are you planning to discuss alcohol misuse with a student? If so, you should ask the questions in the table on this information sheet. You can also use an online self-assessment test (see the links below the table).



#### What should I do if the student or their parents or friends are also concerned?

Are friends worried, or is the student concerned about their own alcohol consumption? This is also a sign of alcohol misuse. You should close the conversation with the following questions:

- Has anyone ever mentioned your drinking?
- Has anyone ever told you to drink less?
- Do you ever worry about your drinking habits?
- What do you do when you are worried? What is the outcome of that?

Score	0	1	2	3	4
<b>Questions</b>					
1. How often do you have a drink containing alcohol?	never	once a month or less	2-4 times a month	2-3 times a week	4 times a week or more
2. How many drinks containing alcohol do you have on a typical day when you drink?	1-2 glasses	3-4 glasses	5-6 glasses	7-9 glasses	10 glasses or more
3. How often do you have six or more drinks on one occasion?	never	less than once a month	2-4 times a month	2-3 times a week	4 times a week or more
					<b>Total score</b>

#### For accessible information about alcohol:

- [allesoverdrinken.nl/apps/zelftest/](https://allesoverdrinken.nl/apps/zelftest/) 
- [alcoholinfo.nl/watdrinkjij](https://alcoholinfo.nl/watdrinkjij) 
- [jouwggd.nl](https://jouwggd.nl) 
- [jellinek.nl/english/addicted/](https://jellinek.nl/english/addicted/) 

**Is a student drinking excessively? Do you think that this constitutes alcohol misuse?**

A student who drinks excessively should talk to a prevention worker. How can you encourage a student to make an appointment with a prevention worker?

- Give the student insight into their alcohol consumption and into its impact on their ability to function properly, for example its impact on their academic results. Emphasize that it would be sensible to think about their alcohol consumption, focusing on the positive aspects of reducing their alcohol intake. Also discuss the student's reasons for drinking too much. It may be a sign of a mental health issue; try to talk about this as specifically as possible.
- Be open about the meeting with the prevention worker, and tell the student what the prevention worker will want to discuss. Prevention workers provide information about alcohol and advice on drinking habits. Where necessary, the prevention worker can help the student to drink less. Also discuss what the prevention worker will expect of the student. If necessary, you can suggest accompanying the student to the meeting with the prevention worker.
- Does the student not want to make an appointment with a prevention worker? In that case, make an appointment to talk about it again. Bear in mind that you will usually have to discuss this more than once with the student.

**Tips for discussing alcohol misuse with students**

- Discuss specific signs only.
- Bear in mind that the student may also have other problems; make sure that you are aware of this.
- The purpose of your discussion is to get the student to make an appointment with a prevention worker. Focus your conversation on this and try to get the student to make an appointment straight away, by asking questions such as: "When have you got time?", or: "I know someone who

can help you. Shall I ask if they can come next time too?" Do not assume the role of the prevention worker.

You can find more tips on motivational interviewing on information sheet 4.

**Tip:** Follow a training course for student counsellors in recognizing and discussing substance misuse and referring students. Many local addiction treatment centres offer such a training course. You can also follow the free Dutch-language 'Recognizing and discussing substance misuse' e-learning course at [ggzacademy.nl](http://ggzacademy.nl)

**Tips for international students**

Before you start, explain to the student that:

- Everything that you discuss with the student is confidential. Due to cultural differences, there may be more of a taboo on discussing alcohol than there is for students from the Netherlands.
- The legal drinking age is higher in many countries than in the Netherlands (18 years), and there may be other customs regarding alcohol. Talk about this so that the student is aware of it.

Be aware that we are used to asking very direct questions in the Netherlands.

Also good to know: a consultation with a prevention worker can also be conducted in English. This can be done anonymously, without referral from a GP, and is free.

Watch this video by [Jellinek](#).

**Names, email addresses and telephone numbers**

Look at the map on the [moti4](http://moti4.nl) website for contact details of prevention workers in your municipality or region: [www.moti-aanmelders.nl](http://www.moti-aanmelders.nl)



### What is a motivational interview?

In a motivational interview, you:

- Try to get the student to tell you that they have a problem.
- Try to get the student to tell you what could motivate them to change their behaviour.

The goal of the interview is behavioural change, or to motivate the student to accept counselling or help. The idea is to let students say things themselves and let them make their own decisions. This has the highest chance of achieving a change in behaviour.

### Why conduct a motivational interview?

The main reasons for holding a motivational interview are:

- To achieve behavioural change. You do this by letting the student talk about their concerns about change.
- Students are often not intrinsically motivated to change their behaviour, and this may stem from fear. The discussion between the prevention worker and the student can create a safe space for the student and therefore contribute to this motivation.
- To get the student to recognize the benefits of consuming no or less alcohol in a positive way. Benefits include better concentration, improved sleep and positive influences on their academic results.
- Many students are reluctant to discuss their alcohol consumption and to change their behaviour. You should be aware that this is logical and show that you understand it.

### The four key principles of motivational interviewing

#### 1. Use reflective listening

Listen carefully and confirm what the student says. Express empathy and try to get the student to trust you.

#### 2. Develop discrepancy

Let the student talk about their current behaviour and the behaviour that

they would like to display in the future. In this way, the difference between their current behaviour and their future goals becomes clear.

#### 3. Avoid conflict

Is the student resisting change? See things from the student's point of view: don't argue or get into a heated discussion, as this can cause the student to become defensive and irritated.

#### 4. Support self-efficacy

Emphasize the student's autonomy and own ability.

### Tips for an effective interview

- **Focus.** Make sure that the conversation stays on track.
- **Open-ended questions.** Open-ended questions start with "What", "How", "Why" or "When" and give students the opportunity to talk. Closed questions can only be answered with "yes" or "no".
- **Reflective listening.** This means checking that you have understood the answer correctly. Do this without using closed questions.
- **Affirmation.** Compliment the student on their efforts and express recognition of their strengths.
- **Summarize.** Ensure a structured interview by summarizing from time to time. This also makes sure that you have understood the student correctly.
- **Time and place.** Take sufficient time for the interview and find a quiet place where you will not be disturbed.
- **Write.** Write down what the student says so that you don't forget anything. Also, ask the student to confirm that what you have written down is what they meant. This is also an expression of respect.

### More information

[expertisecentrumalcohol.trimbos.nl/items/details/alcohol-en-motiverende-gespreskvoering](https://expertisecentrumalcohol.trimbos.nl/items/details/alcohol-en-motiverende-gespreskvoering) 

**When should I refer a student to a specialist?**

Two situations are described below in which you should refer a student for specialist counselling:

1. The student is willing but unable to change their behaviour.
2. The student is drinking so much that this constitutes alcohol misuse, but the student does not recognize this.

**Tips:** Low-threshold treatment can often be provided, such as anonymous online self-help. If the behaviour does not yet constitute addiction, low-threshold addiction treatment can be provided by a prevention worker. The student's GP can provide a referral for more specialist treatment. You can also refer a student to [Adviesgesprek | Alles Over Drinken](#) (Dutch-language) for a free counselling session.

**Contact with the person who raised their concern about the student's alcohol consumption**

Let the person who raised their concern about the student's alcohol consumption with you (e.g. fellow student, board member, lecturer, mentor) know what steps you have taken. However, you are not permitted to talk about what was discussed with the student. Providing feedback in this way encourages the person or organization to remain alert to alcohol misuse.

**What to do if the student has other problems?**

Does the student have other problems in addition to alcohol misuse? If so, refer the student to other healthcare providers, such as the mental health service (GGZ) through the GP, and check whether the student is aware that they can make an appointment with the educational institution's student psychologist.

**Would you like more information?**

Read the [guidelines and the appendices to the guidelines](#) (in Dutch).